Ishiguro?s Quintessential English Butler: Is he Actually Japanese?

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Sarah Holland

Introduction: The Butler-*Sarariman* Metaphor

The quintessential English butler referred to in the title is Stevens, the main character in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). I first read *The Remains of the Day* after the novel won the Man Booker Prize in 1989, (the Booker Prize is the most prestigious literary awarded in Britain); that was my first experience of reading Ishiguro. Having read *The Remains of the Day*, I then sought out Ishiguro's earlier works to read, and have subsequently read his later novels. Incidentally, though somewhat irrelevantly, I attended the same British university as Ishiguro --- possibly even at the same time! Moreover, we both have daughters of the same name, born in the same year. More relevant is the general view that Ishiguro is "One of the world's most important contemporary writers" (Beedham, 2010, p. 1). And specifically, "The representation of the butler Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* is a fine example of how Ishiguro's writerly control is ultimately the mark of creative innovation" (James, 2009, p. 54). It is Ishiguro's 'creative innovation' of literary metaphors that interests me here.

It was partly because the novelist Kazuo Ishiguro has a Japanese name, and partly because I first read the novel in Japan, that I made the connection between a dedicated English butler and a devoted Japanese *sarariman*. Thus, in this paper I set out to explore the idea of a metaphorical connection between the characterization of the English butler Stevens and a typical Japanese company employee. In essence, how far does the butler-*sarariman* metaphor stand up to scrutiny? And, what can we learn through such an analysis?

Initially, I briefly put Ishiguro and his work in a literary context, and then I outline some metaphorical terminology useful for the discussion. This is followed by a general description of English butlers and Japanese salaried employees. Having set the scene, I then explore the metaphorical similarities between Stevens and a Japanese *sarariman*.

After that, I explain the limitations of this metaphorical interpretation and why other key elements of the novel are as important. Finally, based on the discussions presented here, I attempt to answer the question posed in the title.

Biography

It seems that almost all reviews or guides of Ishiguro's work start with some kind of biographical notes. This seems necessary to explain why a novelist with such an obviously Japanese name is writing his novels in English. Ishiguro is (now) British; he was, however, born in Japan to Japanese parents. He spent his early life in Nagasaki and moved to England at the age of five. He has lived in England ever since, attending both school and university in England. He now lives in London. Although his home language while growing up was Japanese, his formal education was in the medium of English. During his past visits to Japan, Ishiguro has always spoken English in public. Interestingly, although all his works are in English, positioning his contemporary literary status within British literature causes considerable critical discussion.

In terms of literary identity is not exactly clear where Ishiguro fits in. According to Sim (2010), many academic sub-fields claim Ishiguro as their own. "These include Asian diasporic writing, minority writing, cosmopolitan literature, postcolonial writing, world literature and comparative literature" (p. 5). Ishiguro called himself 'an international writer'. In addition, the genre of *The Remains of the Day* is similarly indistinct. Sim noted that two critics claimed that "the novel layers together five different genres: the travelogue, the political memoir, the country house romance, farce, and the essay on values" (p. 129). In a world of increasing globalization, 'creative innovation' in literature as a whole is also pushing against existing boundaries.

Metaphors

Metaphors function in discourse to explain, clarify, describe, express, evaluate and entertain; in addition, and key to *The Remains of the Day*, metaphor is used to "convey a meaning in a more interesting or creative way" (Knowles and Moon, 2006, p. 4). In order to write clearly about metaphors and how they work in *The Remains of the Day*, it is first necessary to introduce and define some technical terms related to figurative language. Different linguists use the terminology to describe metaphorical uses and effects in slightly different ways. In basic terms, three things need to be considered, the

metaphor, its meaning, and the similarity or connection between the two. The traditional way of describing metaphors is as the vehicle, the topic and the grounds. I follow the definitions and schematic representation advocated by (Knowles and Moon, 2006).

The metaphoricity related to butler-salary man is not explained or discussed in the novel itself. The metaphor is not established explicitly; as with metaphorical use in general, any connections are implicit (Knowles and Moon, 2006, p. 9 & p. 67). It is up to the reader to divine any similarities or connections between the two. Adopting the terminology as explained above, the metaphor in question expressed schematically looks like this:

> **context:** *The Remains of the Day* — through the entire novel
> **metaphor/vehicle:** Stevens the butler
> **meaning/topic:** Typical Japanese salaryman
> **connection/grounds:** Self-denying, unquestioning professional dedication to a job

It is worth noting in passing the evident gender bias in the word *sarariman* / salary man. The words certainly imply a member of the *male* work force. A working woman, at least in my view, always has more than her paid employment to think about. For many working women, in addition to their careers or jobs, there are also the demands of the family and the running the home to consider. Often women cannot afford to be so single-mindedly fixated on their work-lives.

I am not suggesting that *The Remains of the Day* is a full-blown, developed allegory where every single event in Steven's narrative metaphorically represents corresponding aspects of a typical Japanese company employee's life. Moreover, although Stevens definitely considered there was an essential 'moral dimension' (p. 116) to his work as a butler, and there is moral significance inherent in the narrative, as in an allegory, it is not the most salient aspect of the novel; although it is perhaps one of the most important.

It is common in metaphorical use that not all the features of the vehicle are necessarily connected to the topic (Donoghue, 2014); it is the relationship between the

literal and the metaphorical meanings that illustrate how effective the metaphor vehicle is. The interpretation of a metaphor is open to more latitude than literal language. "One of the things that makes metaphor so powerful as a communicative device is its imprecision or fuzziness" (Knowles and Moon, 2006, p. 23). It may seem contradictory, but imprecision can actually creatively facilitate richer communication. It is the exploration of the similarities or connections between the vehicle and the topic and which prototypical features could be transferred and which are ignored or suppressed in the novel that are relevant here. Notably, not all the features of the source have to be transferred to the target domain.

The traditional framework for metaphor analysis is based on similarities; however since the work by Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphors are also relevant (Knowles and Moon, 2006, p. 55). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that human thought processes are mainly metaphorical. This idea would help explain why both Stevens and Ishiguro cannot avoid metaphor, if metaphors are an inevitable part of communication. Commonly employed conceptual metaphors describe one phenomenon in terms of another for a better understanding of the concept. An example of a conceptual metaphor from *The Remains of the Day* is described later.

Not the Film

The Remains of the Day was made into a successful film with very well-known actors: Stevens was played by Antony Hopkins and Miss Kenton, the housekeeper, by Emma Thompson. The movie version, however, is not relevant to the focus of this paper because the metaphorical effects in a novel and movie work differently. When reading a novel the action, both literal and figurative, is experienced within a reader's imagination and stimulated verbally. A movie, on the other hand, being visual and auditory, is experienced via external stimulation, therefore more physically and realistically. The movie's depiction of how things actually happened in reality possibly inhibits the mind from working in a metaphorical realm, or at least, film fuels the mind differently. Therefore, because the focus is on verbal metaphor here, I only discuss the book.

My approach does not imply that cinema has no metaphorical effects; of course, movies can be rich in symbolic meanings that depend on non-linguistic interpretation

(Knowles and Moon, 2006). However, reading a novel is, in the first instance, a verbal experience; thus, in this paper, I am primarily interested in the workings of linguistic metaphors used in literature, rather than visual metaphors used in film.

The Butler

Next, I discuss butlers in English literature to better understand the literary uniqueness of Stevens's character and possible metaphorical connections to a Japanese salary man. Plenty of butlers appear in other English novels. I give examples of butlers taken from works by famous novelists from the relevant period, the early twentieth century. A comparison of other fictitious butlers helps to illustrate how Butler Stevens shares some similarities with other literary butler figures and yet is, in others ways, distinctive.

Agatha Christie who often included English country houses in her plots, accordingly, has a butler character in attendance. For example, in *ABC Murders* (1936), when Christie's detective Poriot was visiting a country house, the door was opened by the elderly butler, Deveril, who was distressed by the death of his master. Nonetheless, he managed a "This way, sir.", and ushered the guests into the dining room, asking "Is that all, sir?" before being dismissed.

Secondly, here is an example from a Sherlock Holmes story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. A butler in this story announces the death of his master thus: "'Sir James, sir!' said he with a solemn face. 'Sir James died this morning'" (Conan Doyle, 1917). With no further words of grief or explanation the butler led Sherlock Holmes into the drawing room.

These fictional butlers are certainly competent and dignified in manner, but essentially peripheral to the main action. The butlers' roles in most plots are simply to introduce the more major characters; often the butlers are not mentioned again, sometimes not even to be dismissed from the narratives. Traditionally, the butler figure is of minor significance and usually a stock character, reserved, respectful and, restricted. As Ishiguro remarked (Shaffer and Wong, 2008), the butler figure is almost a caricature.

In contrast, perhaps the most well-known butler-type character in English literature is that of Jeeves in the comic stories by P. G. Wodehouse. Interestingly, Wodehouse wrote the Jeeves stories in the years from1915 - the1930s, a period corresponding to the main period described in *The Remains of the Day*. In terms of character and literary function, Jeeves and Stevens are totally dissimilar. Jeeves serves a young man of high society, Bertram Wooster. Wooster is best described in the word of his Aunt Dahlia "a maddening half-wit" (Wodehouse, 1922). Jeeves, on the other hand, in the eyes of his master, has brains, "pure intelligence", shrewdness and the resources to take care of Bertie Wooster and his aristocratic friends in their light-hearted social high jinks. The main duties of a valet, the gentleman's gentleman, are to announce visitors, serve drinks, look after the master's wardrobe and dress him appropriately for various high-class social occasions. Jeeves, who has impeccable taste, is obsessed with guiding his employer's dubious choices by selecting suitable attire and grooming for him. It cannot be conceived that Stevens would ever presume to question his employer, Lord Darlington, about anything, even his choice of necktie, let alone politics.

However, Stevens and Jeeves are similar in their modes of speech. Apart from their invariable, "Yes, sir" or "Is that so, sir.", the style of their longer utterances is also similar, as the excerpts below show.

> Jeeves: "Your criticism of it at the time, sir, was that it was too elaborate, but I do not think it is so in reality. As I see it, sir, the occupants of the house, hearing the fire bell ring, will suppose that a conflagration has broken out." (Wodehouse, 1922, p. 282)
>
> "If you will pardon me for interrupting you, sir, I fancy Mrs. Travers is endeavouring to attract your attention" (Wodehouse, 1922, p. 289).
>
> Stevens: "Please excuse me, sir. As it happened, I had a word or two more to say on the topic … . If you will indulge me by listening, I would be most grateful. But I am afraid this will have to wait for another occasion" (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 90).
>
> "I'm sorry, sir, but I am unable to assist you in this matter" (Ishiguro, 1989, p.

196).

The two characters' butler-speak, as in when the manservant addresses his master or superiors, is often indistinguishable in style. The long-winded, pompous speech though often humorous, is also frequently irritating.

Wodehouse's character tweaks the fictive butler tradition for comic effect. Jeeves, unlike the more traditional literary butler, has a prominent role in the action, the brains of the manservant in contrast to the comic stupidity of the aristocratic employer; this reversal of traditional expectations is thus the source of laugh-out-loud-humor. Ishiguro's off-kilter butler is also funny; but the humor is of a very different kind. The humor of the Stevens character, being for the most part deeply ironic, does not generate guffaws of laughter.

More recently, an endearing butler, Mr. Carson, appeared in the television drama *Downton Abby*, also set in the pre- and post- World War II years (the TV series was shown on NHK in 2015 and gained an enthusiastic following, especially among some of my Japanese colleagues). Carson was a popular character with a dramatically developed, rounded personality of his own. As with Ishiguro's Stevens, a butler as a main character in his own right is an indication of the more socially egalitarian times we live in, especially in comparison to the marked social class divisions of Britain in the 1920s and 30s when *The Remains of the Day* was set.

Dignity is a distinguishing characteristic of all the fictitious butlers described thus far. It is no exaggeration to say that partly due to the success of Downton Abbey and partly due to modern economic success in certain parts of the world, as in China and the Middle East, for instance, world demand for butlers has lately increased. Interestingly though, it seems that *dignity* remains an essential butler attribute.

> It seems British-trained traditional butlers are in high demand with new billionaires determined to live like the 'old money' families of the early twentieth century. ⋯. It can be a very demanding job, but the right person will manage to keep a smile on their face and to maintain an air of old fashioned British dignity. (Galvin, 2012)

Dignity is a central theme of *The Remains of the Day* and Stevens's reflections on the nature of dignity take the reader into the political and moral core of the book. This is a complex reading which can lead metaphorically in diverse directions. I return to this point later.

A Salary Man

Before I make some direct connections between Butler Stevens and a Japanese salary man, I briefly analyze the term 'salary man'. It is not consistently used as two words, sometimes it appears as one, 'salaryman'. Here I use 'salary man' as two words. *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that the word is used "especially in Japan". It is not a word I would have commonly used before coming to Japan. For a professional employee on a fixed salary, it would be more common to refer to a "white-collar worker", or even a salaried worker, at least in British English, than to a 'salaryman'. The image of a hardworking, compliant *sarariman* committed to *his* (certainly, the word denotes a man) company for life is essentially, if stereotypically, Japanese. A British worker, though often committed, is seldom without recurrent criticism for the boss or employer.

Applying the Metaphor

I was both relieved, I am not the only reader to appreciate the butler-*sarariman* connection, and peeved, my metaphorical reading is not original, to discover Pico Iyer's (1991) description of Stevens: "He reminds me of a *sarariman*" (p. 586). More eloquently, he wrote:

> For Ishiguro's butler is so English he could be Japanese, in his finely calibrated sense of rank, his attention to minutiae, his perfectionism and his eagerness to please; his pride in his subservience, and his home is only in the past. Stevens has no self outside his job, and no thought for anything except his job.

I disagree that Stevens is stuck living in the past, at least not by the end of the novel, but the rest of Iyer's description succinctly depicts an analogous image of both Stevens and a Japanese salaried worker. Iyer took the metaphorical connections further; he stated that Darlington Hall with its hierarchy training, uniforms, and self-negation could belong to Sony or Toshiba.

The Character of Stevens

Next, I describe the characterization of Stevens to ascertain in what ways he could be said to resemble an image of a Japanese salary man. There are, of course, various deep ways in which Stevens's character is totally idiosyncratic and there can be no correspondences to a salary man image. In contrast, on the surface there are several general points where Stevens can be compared to the image of a Japanese salary man. Weather accurate or not these images of similarity exist.

Stevens prides himself on remaining dignified and not showing his emotions in trying situations and he admires this quality in others. The idea of the inscrutable Japanese is echoed in a BBC World Service article: "'Japanese people are not really good at expressing their emotions.' Terumi tells me. 'People working at companies don't express their opinions or feelings too much'" (Webb, 2016).

The Japanese salary man is said to be reluctant to take holidays, even those due. Stevens never mentions holidays he has taken. The six-day trip he takes to Cornwall is at the suggestion of Mr. Farraday, who will be away from Darlington Hall, and Stevens justifies the time off as being "to do with professional matters" (p. 5). Stevens is perturbed when Miss Kenton starts "To take full advantage of her contracted time off" (p. 170). Previously she had followed Stevens's own example; "She would not really take days off as such unless we were going through a particularly quiet time" (p. 170).

A third similarity is the central but unsung role both butlers and salary men pay in keeping things going. They are similarly relied on for the smooth workings of the whole, be it a grand country house or a modern industrial society.

A closer examination of particular events in the novel reveals in detail more profound possible similarities between Stevens and a stereotypical Japanese salary man. One such occurrence is the dismissal from Darlington Hall of the two Jewish housemaids. Lord Darlington asked Stevens to dismiss the two Jewish maids, who had performed excellently for six years, solely on the grounds of their race. Stevens seemingly accepts the situation, Miss Kenton, on the other hand, is outraged. Stevens explained to her; "Our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer" (p. 149). Steven's use of words 'foibles' and 'sentiments'

is revealing. A desire for fair-play is not a 'fault' or 'weakness'; an opinion that harbors an emotion is not, necessarily, a clash with professionalism. For Stevens the job takes priority; he views the world solely through his perceived professional duty. Miss Kenton is also a dedicated professional, but more just, emotional, outspoken and thus, more compassionately endearing.

Stevens's total trust in his employer's judgement prevents him from acting on his own initiative; or more sinisterly, his faith in duty, allows him to relinquish personal responsibility. In fact, it turned out later that Miss Kenton's idea of the Jewish maids' dismissal being "simply wrong" (p. 149) was echoed by Lord Darlington's himself; "It was wrong, what occurred" (p. 151). Stevens claimed he was dismayed about it, but nevertheless discharged the maids. Stevens's absolute dedication to Lord Darlington prevents him from questioning political events and social issues.

The expression of a similar sentiment, implicit faith in the boss, is evident in the Japanese parliamentary report commissioned after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima.

> The commission's chairman, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a professor emeritus at Tokyo University, said in a scathing introduction that cultural traits had caused the disaster. He said: "What must be admitted — very painfully — is that this was a disaster 'Made in Japan.' Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to 'sticking with the programme'; our groupism; and our insularity. (McCurry, 2012)

Stevens's perceived notion of professionalism is extreme. Therein lays a danger, and a parallel to any employee, not just to the devoted Japanese salary man, but perhaps to anyone who embraces a single-minded, unquestioning dedication to a cause, the potential to become an extremist.

The Limitations of One Metaphor

It would however, be an impoverishing mistake to read *The Remains of the Day* with a single focus on the butler-salary man metaphor, especially if this prevented a reader from fully appreciating the other rich literary techniques employed by Ishiguro.

Such a narrow reading would miss not only other examples in the metaphorical realm, but also the other carefully crafted literary dimensions of the novel; the humor, the subtle unreliability of the narrative voice, and the juxtapositions of narrative time, for example. Furthermore, the themes in the novel are not limited to professional dedication to duty, as applicable in the butler-salary man metaphor. Political, social, and psychological issues interweave with more abstract themes, like the exploration of the meaning of dignity. In the following sections I present examples of Ishiguro's use of other metaphorical language and discuss in more depth the core theme of dignity.

Other Metaphors

In *The Remains of the Day* there are metaphors within metaphors and an interweaving of metaphors that further enrich the themes of the novel. One such metaphorical usage is subtly introduced in Miss Kenton's letter to Stevens. "I will never forget that time we both watched your father walking back and forth in front of the summerhouse, looking down at the ground *as though* he hoped to find some precious jewel he had dropped there" (my italics, p. 50). 'Jewel' here is a simile made explicit by the words 'as though'. Yet the simile is also functioning metaphorically at an implicit level. This needs explaining.

When Stevens's father's capabilities diminish due to the infirmities of age; evidenced by an incorrectly placed Chinaman (bone china vase), trembling hands, a dripping nose, and the serious fall he suffered outside the summer house, his domestic duties are drastically reduced. Soon after this, the event referred to in Miss Kenton's letter occurred. Stevens senior is seen pacing up and down in the garden near the scene of his fall, his eyes fixed on the grass as if looking for something prized that he had lost. The setting sun casts orange shafts of light; an evening breeze lifts his hair. Stevens senior is searching, in vain, for the 'jewel' of his lost physical, and therefore professional, competence. Both had faded, like the day in which the sun was setting; inevitably, the only event which can follow, after the remains of the day, is the end of the day (figuratively, life). It is an exquisitely sad, implicit metaphorical allusion, initiated by the jewel simile, but with extended significance in the context of the wider narrative.

The lexical metaphor expressed schematically is as follows:

Context: Miss Kenton's letter; "as though he hoped to find some precious jewel" (p. 50)
Metaphor / vehicle: lost jewel
Meaning / topic: something valuable, precious or desirable — unable to locate
Connection / grounds: the idea that if a jewel is lost it warrants a serious search to find it again.

The figurative metaphor expressed schematically is different.

Context: "my father's figure could be seen, pacing slowly with an air of preoccupation…. as though he hoped to find some precious jewel he had dropped there" (p. 50)
Metaphor / vehicle: searching for something
Meaning / topic: valued abilities of the past
Connection / grounds: the idea that those bygone days can never return

The similes within metaphors and the interweaving of other figurative language can also be illustrated by the conceptual metaphor; LIFE (or a part of life) IS A JOURNEY. This metaphor could apply to the motor trip Stevens makes in *The Remains of the Day*. During this journey Stevens gradually travels towards a deeper understanding. The further he gets away from Darlington Hall the freer his thinking becomes and he becomes able to think about the 'whole dimension' of questions and issues. During the physical journey, from overcoming various difficulties along the way, running out of radiator water and petrol, from meeting different people, such as a Colonel's batman (p. 119) and Harry Smith (p. 183), and eventually, Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn) (p. 232), from breaking his heart, to finally finding enlightenment at the close of the day; Stevens learns more about life and gains deeper psychological insights. As Hammond pointed out, "That journey is more than a sightseeing trip or professional visit — it is also a figurative journey into his past and the self" (Hammond, 2010, p. 99). In schematic terms, the metaphor is like this:

Context: the "expedition" to the West Country, the car journey Stevens takes
Metaphor / vehicle: a journey
Meaning / topic: discovery of meaning in life

Connection / grounds: the idea that traveling on a journey is like going through life

A final example of the interweaving of metaphors can be seen at the end of the book which is also at the end of Stevens's journey, when the lights come on. Throughout the narrative Stevens nearly always ponders life in literal terms; his view is seemingly fixed on the literal plane. Indeed, part of his inability to understand bantering is not just his lack of spontaneity and empathy, but also his inability to make non-literal connections. In the final section of the novel, three pages from the end, Stevens is on the bench on Weymouth pier. He realizes that when the man he had been talking to said that the evening was the best part of the day, he was 'speaking figuratively" (p. 240). The long awaited lights come on, literally illuminating the pier and, metaphorically, Stevens's new understanding. His dawning realization of the workings of metaphor and his appreciation of the value of "human warmth" occur almost simultaneously. This metaphor expressed schematically is as follows.

Context: the pier lights coming on at the at the end of the day (p. 240)
Metaphor / vehicle: the lights
Meaning / topic: better understanding
Connection / grounds: the idea that when lights or illuminations are switched on deeper understanding follows

Subsequently, Stevens looks forward to a future of service to Mr. Farraday. Perhaps ultimately, with his new depth of understanding, he may even learn to banter. The power of the novel is that one metaphorical reading, the butler-salary man interpretation, does not preclude another; the more metaphors the merrier, as it were. The ready reader has myriad meanings to explore.

Dignity

As I have already mentioned, dignity is a central theme in *The Remains of the Day*. While this theme is related to the possibilities inherent in the butler-salary man metaphor, the novel's narrative analysis goes far beyond the credible parallels in this correspondence. Stevens admires dignity above all else. For him dignity relates to decorum, propriety, and keeping a professional demeanor at all times, no matter how

challenging. When he meets a group of villages in the Taylor's sitting room he is confronted by alternative views of dignity.

While Stevens was talking to the villagers he is asked about what marks someone out as a true gentleman. Stevens suggested it was 'dignity'. To which Harry Smith replied, "Dignity isn't just something gentlemen have. Dignity's something every man and woman in this country can strive for and get" (p. 186). Later he adds, "There's no dignity to be had in being a slave". In the words of Harry Smith dignity is really about is being free, free to vote and free to express your opinions. Harry Smith, and his commonplace name suggests that he is a metaphor for the ordinary person, has a completely different concept of dignity.

Knowles & Moon (2006) called personification "a subtype of metaphor" (p. 7). After a speech made by Micelle Obama in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election in the U.S.A. there was an outpouring of support for her because had supported women's rights. One resulting Tweet relevant here mentioned metaphorical dignity. The Tweet read: "I love to see these letters to Michelle Obama — proud to see dignity personified so that we can all have dignity" (BBC, 2016). It seems that the Tweet and Harry Smith are more in tune about the idea of dignity than Stevens's view.

Stevens longed to be 'dignity personified', however, Miss Kenton saw Stevens's unwavering dignified manner as a pretense. He backs away from developing any emotional relationship with Miss Kenton, determined to maintain strictly dignified professional terms between them. Confining himself to the butler role, he is unable to reveal, or even understand, his true feelings. In the context of being a butler, Stevens commands respect, but then, more importantly, in the context of his life as a whole, he evokes pity.

Nevertheless, the end of the novel is not absolutely tragic; Stevens has a broken heart, lost his former dignity, and finally cried. Yet, through the tears he has arrived at a new understanding. By the end, he has gained a softer, more humble, humane dignity. The novel offers a more optimistic view of humanity if the reader can believe, like Stevens believes, doubtful though it may seem, that he can emotionally warm up, make a genuine human connection and indeed, learn to banter. Bantering is itself a kind of

metaphor for these softer, jovial, more appealing features of human discourse.

A Further Limitation: A Metaphor in Various Ways

In addition to the literary techniques and thematic contents of the novel possibly being under-appreciated by an overemphasis on the butler-salary man metaphor, there is a far more crucial limitation. Stevens is actually a metaphor: Ishiguro said in an interview "He's a metaphor for me in various ways" (Shaffer and Wong, 2008, p. 100). Stevens serves as a metaphor for all of us. Ishiguro also said, "I was suggesting that to some extent most of us are butlers" (Knopfdoubleday, 2015.). In an interview with Dom Swaim Ishiguro said:

> Most of us, we don't head governments or lead coup d'états. What we do is we do a job, we work for an employer or organization or may be some cause — political cause — and we just do a little thing. … in other words, we're rather like butlers" (Shaffer and Wong, 2008, p. 101).

His point is that we all make our contribution in life and do our best, but how can we know, in the final analysis, where our contributions will lead? In relation to the character of a butler, Ishiguro found that:

> In most places in the world that the figure of the butler stands for a certain kind of ridiculous, stiff, emotionally constipated caricature of a human being …. And I wanted very much in this book [*The Remains of the Day*] to talk about emotional suppression, the tendency to mistake, the tendency to equate expressing emotion with weakness. And I think this a trait very strong in English and Japanese Society. (Shaffer and Wong, 2008, p. 102).

If we are all butlers then obviously the butler-salary man metaphor is only going to work so far.

Conclusion: Yes, No, Not Really

I set out to explore the possibilities inherent in a metaphorical reading of *The Remains of the Day* in which Stevens the butler represents a Japanese *sarariman*. In drawing to a conclusion it is appropriate to make an explicit attempt to answer the

question posed in the title: Is Stevens really Japanese? The least satisfying, but most accurate, answer is 'yes' and 'no' and, 'not really'.

'Yes' is a possible answer because the correspondences between Stevens the butler and a Japanese salary man exist to a certain extent, but only in a rather general and shallow way. Moreover, the depth of the possible metaphorical correspondences depends on the extent to which an individual reader is familiar with the work-life of a Japanese salary man. This metaphorical reading could encourage readers to see the nature of professional duties in new and unexpected ways.

On the other hand, 'no' is also a possible answer because a metaphorical reading of *The Remains of the Day* should not be limited to making comparisons *only* between Stevens and a Japanese salaried employee. This is because what Ishiguro intended to convey was that we are all, to some degree, butlers. The metaphoricity is more universally applicable; it does, however, again depend on a reader's willingness to make imaginative connections. Furthermore, reading the novel with a single metaphorical focus would be to miss not only other language in the metaphorical realm, but also the other carefully crafted literary dimensions of the novel. Opposite answers to the titular question are simultaneously possible because of the contrary nature of the workings of metaphor; a metaphor both constructs and constrains understanding (Knowles & Moon, 2006). Although, as I have discussed, there are certain justifications for making the butler-salary man parallel, it is, in the final analysis, an inadequate reading of the novel.

The answer 'not really' is also reasonable because it may be a false supposition that the 'quintessential' butler or *sarariman* even exist. The golden age of the British butler reflects a particular historical time. Before World War II at the height of the era of the English country houses there were more than 30,000 butlers employed (Wikipedia.org., n. d.). After the Second World War with the decline of the English country house and other far-reaching social changes, the post of a butler also changed. By the late 1950s, the period when the novel is set, even Stevens realized that butlers need to move with the times if they are to survive. Stevens discusses the changes in the butler profession, his own generation of butlers he considered different in kind from that of his father's generation. Moreover, he anticipates different duties with his new American employer, Mr. Farraday. The 'quintessential' butler is in itself a stereotype originating in a certain

historical period.

Furthermore, the image of a typical Japanese salary man also has to change with the times. Economic changes, a less secure employment climate, corporate stress checks, Cool Biz and various other developments make the image of the dutiful *sarariman* of the 1980s less valid. The point again is, what was once 'the quintessential' may no longer be so, if it ever was. However, being able to pose the question in the first place highlights the artistry of the novel; though based on realism, it is not reality; metaphors wield their power by exploiting the non-literal. Starting from a metaphor to delve into the depths of *The Remains of the Day*, though fascinating, is after all only one of many alternative interpretive lenses and one that inevitably has limitations.

There is no doubt, however, that *The Remains of the Day* and other Ishiguro novels lend themselves to metaphorical interpretations. Ishiguro himself encouraged such readings. Speaking of his first three books, he said, "These books I want to be read metaphorically" (Shaffer & Wong, 2008, p. 151). It is then an open invitation to explore metaphors in his works. This invitation surely extends to Ishiguro's latest mythical fable, *The Buried Giant* (2015). I have read the new book. In this story, there await even more fruitful metaphors to explored.

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